

THE ANTICHRIST

**A Biblical and
Confessional View**



Rev. David Silversides

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THE ANTICHRIST: A BIBLICAL AND CONFESSIONAL VIEW

Rev. David Silversides

The subject which I have been asked to address is "The Antichrist: A Biblical and Confessional View." As the Lord may enable, we shall look at three things: *Firstly*, the biblical teaching (and this will form the major part of the address); *secondly*, the practical application; and *thirdly*, the question of confessional subscription.

I. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

We begin by looking briefly at a few passages of Scripture before looking more closely at 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 1-10.

Revelation chapters 17 to 21

Here we have the true church of God pictured as both a woman and a city:

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." (Revelation 19:7-8)

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21:2)

But while the true church is pictured as a faithful woman and a holy city, antichristianity (evidently in its most hideous and concentrated form) is also represented as a woman and a city but both of a very different kind:

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:" (Revelation 17:1).

"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:..." (Revelation 17:4-6).

So both the church and antichristianity are described as a woman and a city, but of completely opposite character. There is identity of form but opposite natures. This indicates that antichristianity is to be in the form of false Christianity and a false church. We are to think of the Antichrist in terms of apostate Christianity rather than open atheistic or pagan opposition.

1 John 2:18-19

"Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

(a) Antichristianity arising from apostasy

The general teaching here is, of course, that it is the last time, which means the whole New Testament age from the first coming of Christ to his return in glory (Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Acts 2:16-17). We should not think in terms of only the very end of history, since the apostles regarded themselves as already in the last days.

The apostle John indicates that the fact that it is the "last time" is confirmed by the presence of "many antichrists" and these were the precursors of the Antichrist which was to come, concerning whom they had already been instructed.

These "many antichrists" were not openly pagan enemies, but apostates from the church of God: *"They went out from us."* And if antichrists in general were apostates from the true religion, it is reasonable to suppose that the Antichrist will be of similar kind. We should look for the Antichrist not in overt paganism or atheism, but in false Christianity and as a result of an apostasy from the truth.

Of course, the bitterest enemies of the church have normally arisen out of apostasy. So in Psalm 83:5-12 the list of enemies of Israel includes the descendants of apostate Ishmael and Esau as well as the offspring of Lot and the descendants of Abraham by Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4).

(b) The Greek Preposition "anti-"

"Anti-" does not necessarily mean simply, "against," but also "in the place of." For example, in Matthew 2:22 we read:

"And when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod..."

In this case the phrase "in the room of" translates the preposition "anti-." Again, Luke 11:11 states:

"...if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?"

Here "anti-" is translated by "for," so "anti-" can mean "fulfilling the part of" or "instead of" or "in the place of." It can be used to convey the thought of "over against" by way of displacement. This is especially true when used in composite form with another word as in "antichrist." When we think of the Antichrist we should think of one who opposes the Lord Jesus Christ by seeking to take his place.

Daniel 7:8,20,25

"I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.... And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows.... And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

The four beasts mentioned, which we regard as referring to the four great kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, were all opposed to the most High. These pagan kingdoms did oppose God and more or less treated their rulers as the link between the divine

and the human. For example, in Medo-Persia the universe was seen as a closed system with the gods at the top of the sliding scale and various classes of men at the lower end, and the king as a universal semi-god linking the divine and the human.

And yet, the little horn is still distinguished from the others as speaking *"great words against the most High."* This again suggests the idea of one who opposes more light and more explicit truth than the pagan kingdoms that went before.

Summary so far

Taking all that we have seen so far together, we see that we are to look for the Antichrist in the form of an ecclesiastical pseudo-Christian figure, rather than a pagan or atheistical one. That means that neither Napoleon, Hitler, or Idi Amin were the antichrist, nor is Saddam Hussein, however evil. We are to look for a pseudo-Christian figure in the realms of apostasy from true biblical Christianity.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

"¹Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, ²That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. ³Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; ⁴Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. ⁵Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? ⁶And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. ⁸And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: ⁹Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, ¹⁰And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

You will see that this passage gives more information than any other on the marks of the Antichrist, or "the man of sin" as he is called in verse 3. Our method of handling this passage must not be guesswork or imposing some random idea from the present state of world affairs

upon the passage. God has given us his word in such a form that if we are proudly determined to find what we want in it, it can be wrested and abused so that we can convince ourselves that we have found what we want. This we must avoid at all costs. A good cause is never served by bad methods and especially by bad handling of the Scriptures. We must not read into the passage, but let the text of God's holy word speak for itself. This is vital, and such honest dealing with the word of God will commend itself to the hearts and consciences of the people of God who are born of the Spirit.

Our approach, then, must be to draw out the identifying marks of the man of sin from the passage itself, and then having formed our identikit picture, we can see if we recognise him. Concerning the emergence of the man of sin, we can look for answers to some very simple questions from the passage.

(a) When?

The apostle Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians should not be deceived into thinking that Christ's return was about to happen immediately (vv. 1-2). There were things that had to happen before Christ's return could be a possibility and he gives one of them, namely, the appearing of the man of sin.

He mentions three things concerning when he would appear:

(i) The Falling Away (v. 3)

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;"

He would appear as the outworking of a (or *the*) "falling away" ("*apostasia*" from which we have the word "apostasy" in English). So there was to be a large-scale apostasy that would lead to Antichrist's emergence. Apostasy can only take place in the professing church of God, since there must be something to fall away from.

(ii) The Current Trend (v. 7)

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

The seeds of the movement that would lead to this apostasy and

emergence of Antichrist were already at work in the apostle's day. *"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work..."*.

The Scriptures speak of the *"mystery of godliness,"* (1 Timothy 3:16), the word, "mystery," referring to God's unknowable but now revealed eternal plan to save sinners by Jesus Christ. But Satan has his master-plan already at work. The present trend would result in the arrival of the man of sin.

(iii) The Removal of the Restrainer (vv. 6-7)

"And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth [or hindereth] will let, until he be taken out of the way."

There was something withholding, or hindering, the appearance of the man of sin, a restrainer keeping in check his emergence. Notice this restrainer is a thing and a person, the "what" of verse 6, becomes "he" in verse 7.

We also notice the apostle's strange reticence to spell out the identity of this restrainer, though he evidently envisaged that the Thessalonians would understand.

We must remember the events that took place when Paul was in Thessalonica. The Jews, knowing that a religious charge would be of no avail with the Roman authorities, framed a political-sounding charge against Paul and Silas, as had been the case with the Lord Jesus himself before Pilate. Concerning Paul and Silas they state:

"Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus." (Acts 17:7)

It can readily be understood that if by the "what" (v. 6) the apostle in our passage has the Roman empire in mind, and by the "he" (v. 7) he intends to refer to the emperor, he would be careful not to include a direct reference in his letter lest, if the letter came into the wrong hands, it may appear as if he were actually advocating political rebellion.

There are good grounds, then, for regarding the restrainer as the Roman emperors and their empire. This being so, the apostle is teaching that Christ would not return at present because one of the

things which must happen before that could be so is the emergence of the man of sin and though the trend of apostasy which would cause that emergence was already at work, his actual appearance was being providentially checked for a time by the Roman empire until this was taken away.

(b) Where?

"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." (v. 4)

He will appear in the "temple of God." The word "temple" here being that which is used of the Holy Place in the temple, and also to describe the people of God themselves (e.g. Ephesians 2:21-22; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

This indicates that the man of sin would emerge from among the people of God, as a result of an apostasy within the church of God on earth.

(c) Why?

We are given an indication of the purpose of the rising up of the man of sin in the vocabulary used:

"And then shall that Wicked be revealed" (v. 8). The word "revealed" is the word from which we have the term "apocalypse."

"Even him whose coming [parousia] is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (v. 9).

"The mystery of iniquity doth already work" (v. 7).

(i) The Terms Used

These three terms all have a familiar ring. The word "revelation" or "apocalypse" is used in other places of the return of the Lord Jesus, for example in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, *"...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels."* The word "coming" is likewise used in this way, even in verse 7 and verse 8 of our present passage. The term "mystery," as already noted, is used of God's purpose, unknowable unless revealed, to redeem sinners in Christ Jesus and his application by the Holy Spirit of that redemption to Jew and Gentile.

"Great is the mystery of godliness..." (1 Timothy 3:16, cf. Ephesians 3:3-9; Romans 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:51 etc.).

The apostle, then, appears to deliberately use terms that normally refer to Christ to describe the activity of the man of sin. This indicates that Satan's design is to replace Christ by this man of sin.

(ii) The Title Applied

He is also called the "son of perdition" (v. 3). The only other usage of this phrase is in reference to Judas Iscariot (John 17:12), the pretended disciple of Christ who went on pretending until he betrayed the Son of Man with a kiss, a sign of love and loyalty. This indicates that the Antichrist will exist under the guise of Christian profession and acclaimed loyalty to Christ, but actually working in opposition to him, an opposition expressed by attempted displacement as shown earlier.

(iii) The Aim Stated

Then we have the stated aim in verse 4:

"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

He will seek the place of God by claiming prerogatives that belong to God, the concentrated expression of the serpent's lying words, *"ye shall be as gods,"* (Genesis 3:5).

(iv) The Signs Accompanying

Then consider verse 9:

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

The three terms "powers," (sometimes translated "miracles"), "signs" and "wonders," are often used of those authenticating miracles that accompanied the ministry of Christ himself and his inspired spokesmen as they brought the infallible truth of God to men. (John 20:30; Acts 2:22; Romans 15:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4)

The term "power," or "miracle" indicates the nature of the event,

"sign" indicates its purpose and "wonder" its effect on others. We are told that the man of sin will counterfeit these authenticating signs of divine revelation suggesting a specious claim to being an organ of divine revelation, which will also be a feature of the Antichrist.

To summarize, all evidence points to the man of sin as one who while professing to be the friend of Christ actually opposes him by endeavouring to take his place and assume his prerogatives.

(d) How Long? (vv. 7-8)

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming..."

The leaven of that apostasy which would result in the rise of the man of sin was already at work and the man of sin would be revealed when the power of imperial Rome was removed. He will continue until destroyed by the breath of Christ's mouth, and the brightness of his coming. Many regard this as simply a reference to Christ's return and this view is entirely compatible with the idea of a prolonged Antichrist which we argue for below. Nevertheless, the apostle evidently has in mind Isaiah 11:4:

"But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

The language that the apostle takes up, *"the rod of his mouth,"* and *"the breath of his lips,"* evidently refers to the word of the Lord. Although a little beyond the scope of this paper, we submit that there are reasons for regarding this as referring to the advance of the gospel prior to Christ's coming. John Calvin on Isaiah 11:4 says, *"when the prophet says 'by the breath of his lips,' this must not be limited to the person of Christ, for it refers to the word preached by his ministers."* And then on the Thessalonian passage Calvin comments, *"The Antichrist will be reduced to nothing by the word of God."*

The man of sin is to emerge as a result of apostate tendencies in existence in the apostolic age that would develop with the decline of the Roman empire and that would continue at least until toward the

end of the New Testament age when his ultimate destruction commences as the gospel enters its period of greatest advance.

We must conclude that this does not refer to a single individual man, but to a succession of individuals occupying a position throughout a large part of the New Testament age over many centuries.

He is a feature of a large section of the "last days" in the biblical sense of the term. As previously observed the "last days" are the whole period between Christ's first and second comings.

(e) Who?

Let us examine our identikit picture in full. The "man of sin" is a position occupied by a succession of men over a period of many centuries from the decline of the Roman empire until toward the return of Christ. He emerges from within the professing church as a result of an apostatising trend, the seeds of which existed in apostolic days. He professes to be the friend of Christ whilst opposing him by seeking to assume his place and prerogatives and professing false authenticating miracles.

Our shortlist is very short indeed. Only one candidate appears on it: the pope of Rome.

The Westminster Confession is correct:

"There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God." (xxv.vi)

The seeds of Romanism were at work in apostolic times in the errors of works-salvation and the harking after Old Testament ceremony that the epistles so frequently warn against. After the apostolic age the rise of episcopacy with its diocesan bishops led on to the emergence of one bishop above all other bishops, namely the bishop of Rome as "*pontifex maximus*." The collapse of the Roman empire left a vacuum that the bishop of Rome was able to fill by assuming political as well as ecclesiastical power.

When a pope takes office, he is declared to be the "father of princes

and kings," "ruler of the world" and "vicar of our Saviour Jesus Christ." He is regarded as the mouthpiece of God. Salvation is through dependence on him and his sacraments administered by his local priestly representatives.

Although Vatican II has stretched the boundaries of who is saved through Rome, it still maintains that salvation is only through the papacy.

The pope of Rome systematically seeks to usurp Christ's offices of Prophet, Priest and King. No-one in history has attempted to do so with the same height of articulate audacity coupled with spurious profession of loyalty to Christ. A vicar is one who takes the place of another. The Antichrist is one who seeks to take the place of Christ, and you only need to listen to what the pope claims for himself to be assured of his identity. The real vicar of Christ on earth is the Holy Spirit. The Romish pseudo-vicar of Christ is really the pre-eminent vicar of Satan. A vicar is a substitute or representative. Whereas the "many antichrists" of 1 John 2:18 entailed the substitution of a pseudo-christ of false doctrinal construction, the Antichrist seeks to displace the true Christ by claiming to be his authentic representative with all his prerogatives. The principle of displacement-by-alternative is true in both cases, though the method is different.

II. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Firstly, the identity of the man of sin matters. God does not give us anything in his word for nothing. To say that Rome is merely anti-Christian is true, but it is not enough. God's word requires us to go further. The papacy is pinpointed as the pre-eminent long-running enemy of the church of Christ.

Some may object that the Reformers, the Puritans and the Covenanters were simply men of their time. The papacy was a big problem in their day and this over-influenced their judgement. The reverse is actually the case. If we deny that the papacy is the Antichrist and are deceived by the benign image the papacy now portrays, it is we, not our predecessors, who are over-influenced by present surroundings. They saw Rome in its true colours and assessed the matter biblically.

Secondly, a profession of Roman Catholicism is a profession of antichristianity. It is not a profession of biblical faith and Roman Catholic people are the legitimate subjects of evangelistic endeavour. They are not to be treated as brethren. We are to love them and tell them the truth.

The "evangelical Catholic" is to be told that this term is contradictory and given an explanation as to why this is so. We explain what evangelicalism is, and how Roman Catholic teaching is directly contrary to this. We then tell him that we cannot treat his profession of evangelical and biblical Christianity as credible until he severs his links with the Roman Antichrist.

The idea of staying in the Roman system to help reform it must be clearly and strenuously opposed. The Reformation was not a Reformation *of* popery but a Reformation *from* popery. The papacy is to be destroyed, not reformed or purified. The people of God are to get out of the doomed Babylon (Revelation 18:4), and they will rejoice when the whole wicked edifice comes down (Revelation 18:20).

Thirdly, we must resist the policy of "assuming the sale." One of the oldest (and more dubious) selling techniques consists in offering the customer two possibilities and asking which he wants. The possibility that he may want neither is studiously ignored.

This technique, especially in Northern Ireland, has been carried over into the religious realm. In a variety of ways we are being confronted with the question, "Do you want ecumenism with Rome or do you want the old hatred, bitterness and violence?" Of course, Christians do not want either, but that option is never considered. And to be opposed to false ecumenism is to run the risk of being regarded as an enemy of peace. This is grossly unfair, of course, but it is not the first time Christians have been misrepresented.

If, despite all our efforts to explain, we are still called enemies of peace, so be it! The biblical lines of demarcation between truth and error must be kept sharp and clear. The difference between biblical Protestantism and the evil doctrines of the pope of Rome must never be blurred. God's honour requires this. The good of our own souls and of all God's people requires this. Love to our neighbour (including our Roman Catholic neighbour) requires it.

III. CONFSSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

We mentioned earlier that this identification of the Antichrist with the pope of Rome is included in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Should it be?

Firstly, the inclusion can be justified. Some have argued that it is purely because this view was held virtually unanimously in the 17th century and was never really questioned that explains how it found its way into the Westminster Confession. Certainly it is true, for example, that a man like Samuel Rutherford in his letters makes references to the "Roman Antichrist" as a matter of course, being a thing most surely believed amongst God's people at that time.

However, an examination of the minutes of the Westminster Assembly does indicate that agreement on a point was not the only criterion for inclusion in the Confession of Faith. They did consider what should and should not be part of a confession to which the church's officers must subscribe and did not automatically include what had overwhelming support. We should not assume that it found its way into the Confession without positive thought that it was not only true but of such significance that it needed to be included in the creed of the church.

But is it biblical to be so specific? Consider:

(i) Specific naming of enemies of the church is biblical as well as necessary. On a local level, the apostle Paul says to Timothy,

"Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil:... Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words." (2 Timothy 4:14-15)

He names this blatant enemy of the truth for the benefit of Timothy and the church of God.

He does not say to Timothy that there was someone at Ephesus who had been a problem to him and could be to Timothy as well, but charity did not allow him to say who it was. That would have been useless. The apostle loved Timothy and the church of God. So he was specific when necessary.

(ii) The man of sin was meant to be identified. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1, it is clear that the appearance of the man of sin was one development that had to take place before the return of Christ was even a possibility. At that time precise identification was not possible, hence the identikit picture given in the following verses by the Spirit of prophecy, so that when he emerged he could be recognised, otherwise the passage would have no purpose. In the light of the fulfilment of the prophecy, is not such identification a duty?

(iii) It is the duty of the under-shepherds of the flock of God to explain Scripture and to identify the enemies of the church for the good of the flock. It is right for ministers and ruling elders of the church to unitedly warn the people of God of the dangerous wolf.

(iv) Where the particular enemy is biblically identifiable as the outstanding long-running enemy of the church, it is legitimate to indicate the identification in the permanent credal statement of the church.

It must be remembered that the papacy is not a short-term heresy but one running over centuries. It would be absurd to try to include reference to every short-term heretical movement in a confession of faith, but the papacy is of a different order.

Such identification itself also assists the people of God to assess lesser movements (such as the Charismatic Movement) that have a Rome-ward tendency. Even if their theological grasp is insufficient to grapple with all the doctrinal issues involved, when they see the tendency of the movement it will put them on the alert if they have a correct assessment of the papacy.

Secondly, subscription to the Westminster Confession means agreeing with the identification of the Antichrist as the pope of Rome.

This may seem obvious, but it has been seriously questioned. John Macleod, writing in the *Stornoway Gazette* of 22nd May 1997, stated:

"In its creed subscription Free Church ministers and office-bearers homologate the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and other standards subordinate to scripture. The Free Presbyterians, by contrast, endorse the Westminster Confession simpliciter, the ordinand

endorsing every last line. In other words, a Free Presbyterian minister does not merely own a doctrine as his own but all the supporting comments and exegetical points.

So a Free Church minister, as long understood, is required to believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the church and not, for instance, the pope. A Free Presbyterian minister is required absolutely, in addition, to agree that the pope is the 'man of sin, and the son of perdition.'"

What are we to say to this? The ordination vow in question states:

"Do you sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, approved by former General Assemblies of this church, to be founded upon the word of God, and do you acknowledge the same as the confession of your faith?"

The relevant passage in the Westminster Confession as already quoted reads:

"There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God." (xxv.vi)

This teaches us three things: Christ is head of the church; the pope is not the head of the church; the pope is the Antichrist.

John Macleod would have us believe points one and two are doctrines, but point three is not. There is not the slightest basis for this distinction. They all contain teaching and Mr. Macleod's distinction is pure invention.

This randomness is disastrous. Every subscriber to the Westminster Confession is left to decide for himself what parts he will treat as "doctrines" he must believe and what parts he will not.

Suppose we apply this procedure to the first chapter of the Confession of Faith. In the second paragraph of it, we have a list of the books of Scripture which are to be regarded as the word of God. The next paragraph ends:

"The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings."

Which of these phrases would John Macleod have us treat as doctrines and which as supporting statements and points of exegesis? Is the fact that the Apocrypha is not inspired a doctrine? But what about what we should or should not do with it? Do we suppose that the Westminster Assembly had any such distinction in mind when they stated what the Apocrypha is and what use should be made of it? They made no such distinction and neither should we. What shall we do with the chapters on God and the Holy Trinity, or Providence, or Christ the Mediator? Do we have to believe all of it, or some of it? If only some, which parts? Confessional subscription becomes meaningless.

The correct view of ordination vows is to be found in the Westminster Confession itself:

"An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation...." (xxii.iv).

"A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness." (xxii.v)

Presumably John Macleod will not dismiss these statements as mere supporting statements! The "plain and common sense" of the words "the whole doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith" is that they include "all that it teaches." And it teaches that the pope is the Antichrist. Subscribers to the Confession of Faith must believe this to the glory of God and on the basis of his word.

The selective view of confessional subscription is not new and it is not good. It will prove ruinous to the church of God.

When James Renwick, the covenanter, wrote to Sir Robert Hamilton in 1687 concerning David Houston, a minister in Ireland, he wrote of Houston being tender-hearted and zealous in the frame of his spirit. Then he goes on to say of Houston: "As for Mr David Houston, he

carries very straight." There was a time when that was counted a great quality. We need tender, loving and zealous men today holding office in the church of God. We also need men who "carry very straight."

In these muddled times let us seek by God's grace not to be muddled. Let us seek grace to be straight, honest and upright and pray that the Lord will have mercy upon Zion; that he would plead his own cause and revive his church; that he will bring down the tyranny of the man of sin for the glory of his great name. Amen.

This is the address from the 1997 Annual Meeting of the James Begg Society. In a day of confusion, some people look for a future Antichrist, others look for him in worldly leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein. The Rev. David Silversides gives concise and compelling reasons why we should consider the pope of Rome to be this "man of sin" that we are so warned against in Holy Scripture.

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